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Measuring Dispositional Optimism in Large-Scale Studies

Psychometric Evidence for German, Spanish, and Italian Versions of the Scale Optimism-Pessimism-2 (SOP2)

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Abstract. In different fields of the behavioral sciences, a growing demand for brief measures of psychological constructs can be observed. The current research presents new evidence on the reliability and validity of a recently developed ultra-short measure of the optimism construct sensu Scheier and Carver (1985), the German version of the Scale Optimism-Pessimism-2 (SOP2) as well as first evidence on Spanish and Italian adaptations. Reliability estimates indicate good reliability. Correlations with criteria from the nomological net of the construct are as expected. Equivalence of SOP2 factors across language versions is supported. Due to its highly efficient, yet accurate and valid measurement of the construct, the SOP2 is strongly recommended for assessment settings with severe monetary/time constraints, for example, large-scale surveys. Due to the factor equivalence, the SOP2 is also a valuable measure for cross-cultural studies.

Keywords: optimism, pessimism, outcome expectancy, short scale, survey

People differ in their expectation of future events occurring in their life. Whereas some people usually expect positive things to happen to them, others tend to anticipate negative outcomes (Scheier & Carver, 1985). According to Scheier and Carver, positive or negative expectations held by people (optimists/pessimists) rather pertain to life in general, than just to a specific context. These outcome expectancies are considered to be generalized – basically generalized versions of confidence and doubt – and a stable personality trait (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010).

Extensive research provides robust empirical evidence that dispositional optimism is associated with a broad range of favorable outcomes in life such as life satisfaction, low levels of distress and depression, job satisfaction, education, income, and social resources (see Carver & Scheier, 2014; Carver et al., 2010; Williamson, Pemberton, & Lounsbury, 2005). These favorable outcomes seem to be due to a higher ability of optimists to cope with the challenges and threats of everyday life compared to pessimists (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Similar to other personality traits such as conscientiousness (Nes, Carlson, Crofford, de Leeuw, & Segerstrom, 2011), dispositional optimism plays an important role in the

self-regulation of behavior. For example, optimists adjust to adversity more easily by flexibly employing coping strategies when facing environmental stressors (Nes & Segerstrom, 2006). Moreover, optimists are more committed to their high priority goals and more persistent in their effort to reach them even in the face of adversity or difficulty (Carver et al., 2010; Nes et al., 2011). Due to the prominent role in goal-directed behavior, dispositional optimism is also related to other self-regulation constructs such as self-efficacy (e.g., Karademas, 2006; Schwarzer, Bäßler, Kwiatek, Schröder, & Zhang, 1997) and locus of control (e.g., Guarnera & Williams, 1987; Kostka & Jachimowicz, 2010; Scheier & Carver, 1985).

According to these results, dispositional optimism may be considered a core personal resource that is beneficial for a healthy, happy, and successful life. However, there is reason to believe that the coping strategies and cognitive tendencies of optimists beneficial to a broad range of positive outcomes, may lead to less adaptive behavior in some domains – risky investment decisions. For example, Felton, Gibson, and Sanbonmatsu (2003) present results suggesting that the well-replicated gender difference in risk proneness

– men tend to be more willing to take risks compared to women (Byrnes, Miller, & Schafer, 1999) – could be due to an interaction of gender and trait optimism. These authors conducted a portfolio simulation for 13 weeks with students who invested \$500,000 in stocks, options, and futures contracts traded on financial markets. Results showed that optimistic men were rather active in the risky futures and options market and less active in the more conservative New York Stock Exchange.

These results demonstrate that dispositional optimism is related to a broad range of other traits, processes, and outcomes, and thus highly relevant to diverse research questions addressed in the behavioral sciences. In psychological research, dispositional optimism is usually assessed with the 10-item Life Orientation Test (LOT-R; Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994). In other fields, for example, survey research, this measure is rarely used due to severe monetary and time constraints. In recent years, the demand for short but still reliable and valid indicators of psychological constructs in survey research has been growing (Rammstedt, Kemper, & Schupp, 2013).

To meet these demands, Kemper, Beierlein, Kovaleva, and Rammstedt (2013) developed an ultra-short measure for this assessment setting based on a well-known definition of the optimism construct by Scheier and Carver (1985). To measure the construct efficiently the core aspects of the definition were used to develop one 7-point rating scale item for optimism (confidence and expectation of good things to happen) and one for pessimism (doubt and expectation of bad things to happen). Item wording (see Measures section) was optimized for the target population in a cognitive pretest ($N = 20$) to decrease measurement error and to increase item validity (cf. Kemper, Ziegler, Krumm, Heene, & Bühner, 2015; Ziegler, Kemper, & Lenzner, 2015). The resulting Scale Optimism-Pessimism-2 (SOP2) was validated in two samples – one quota sample with two waves and one large sample representative for the German adult population. Psychometric criteria presented by Kemper et al. (2013) corroborate the psychometric quality of the SOP2 score in German samples and its suitability for the measurement of dispositional optimism in research settings (construct reliability across waves $\Omega_w = .94$, stability $r_{tt(6 \text{ weeks})} = .59$, convergent correlation with LOT-R $r = .68$).

The main aim of the research reported here is to present further evidence on the reliability and construct validity of the German SOP2 (sample 1) as well as first evidence on adaptations for the Spanish (castellano; sample 2) and Italian language (sample 3). We report evidence on the reliability as well as concurrent validity of the SOP2 score and factor congruence across versions. Criteria for concurrent validation were derived from the nomological net of the construct as suggested in the literature on test construction (Kemper et al., 2015). As other constructs which play a role in self-regulation of behavior, such as self-efficacy and locus of control, were found to be associated with optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985; Schwarzer et al., 1997), we expected correlations in the medium range accordingly. As risk taking seems to be associated with optimism

Table 1. Sample description

| | Sample 1 | Sample 2 | Sample 3 |
|------------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| | German | Spanish | Italian |
| Sample size | 241 | 207 | 268 |
| Age M (SD) | 46.9 (15.4) | 30.1 (7.5) | 34.2 (8.6) |
| Gender, male | 45% | 35.7% | 39.9% |

(Felton et al., 2003), we used a measure of this construct for validation purposes as well.

Materials and Methods

Participants and Procedure

Descriptive statistics of the three samples are depicted in Table 1. German participants in sample 1 were recruited in 2010 by the certified poll agency BIK MARPLAN based on quotas representing the population distributions of age, gender, education, and residency in the 16 federal states of Germany. Data of 536 persons were collected in two waves with an interval of about 6 weeks between measurements. Among them, 241 respondents received a paper-pencil version of the SOP2. Remaining respondents answered SOP2 items in a computer-assisted personal interview. In the present study, only data of the paper-pencil mode was analyzed as the interview mode might be considered a very different assessment setting due to the interaction of participant and interviewer. Measures in sample 1 included the German SOP2 (Kemper et al., 2013), the General Self-Efficacy (GSE) Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), a single-item risk taking scale (R-1; Beierlein, Kovaleva, Kemper, & Rammstedt, 2014), and a brief Locus of Control measure (IE-4; Kovaleva, 2012) with the subscales internal and external locus of control.

In samples 2 and 3, the Spanish and Italian versions of the SOP2 and the GSE were administered to Spanish and Italian immigrants, respectively, who participated in an online survey of the study *Europe meets in Germany* (EmiG). Participants were mainly recruited in an online social network via posts in about 60 different groups like “Españoles en Berlin,” “Españoles en Alemania,” “Italiani a Norimberga,” or “Italiani a Germania” as well as via mailing lists of different cultural associations. As incentive, two prizes of €50 each were raffled among participants.

Measures

The SOP2 (Kemper et al., 2013) is an ultra-short scale developed to measure the construct of optimism sensu Scheier and Carver (1985). The SOP2 contains two items: “Optimists are people who look to the future with confidence and who mostly expect good things to happen. How would you describe yourself? How optimistic are you in general?”

and “Pessimists are people who are full of doubt when they look to the future and who mostly expect bad things to happen. How would you describe yourself? How pessimistic are you in general?” (English version, currently not validated). Both items are rated on a 7-point rating scale from *not at all optimistic/pessimistic* to *very optimistic/pessimistic*. Psychometric quality of the German version of the SOP2 is well established (Kemper et al., 2013). To adapt the SOP2 to Spanish and Italian respondents, a back translation approach was applied. German, Spanish (castellano), and Italian versions, as well as the English and Greek version of the SOP2 can be downloaded from <http://www.christoph-kemper.net/resources.html> (see also Appendix).

Besides the SOP2, further measures were administered to participants. The GSE (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) is a widely used 10-item measure of self-efficacy beliefs with sufficient psychometric quality. German, Spanish, and Italian versions were obtained from the website of the author (<http://www.ralfschwarzer.de>). Risk taking in the German sample was measured with a 7-point single-item scale which was specifically developed for the efficient assessment of the construct in surveys. Sufficient reliability ($r_{tt(6 \text{ Wochen})} = .74$) as well as construct validity of the R-1 was demonstrated by Beierlein et al. (2014). Moreover, a 4-item Locus of Control measure was administered in the German sample as well containing subscales for internal and external Locus of Control. The IE-4 was comprehensively validated for research purposes by Kovaleva (2012).

Statistical Analysis

For each version of the SOP2, two kinds of validity evidence were gathered – (1) concurrent validity of the SOP2 score and (2) factor congruence across samples. Estimates of concurrent validity were either based on scale scores (Pearson’s correlations) or disattenuated correlations between the SOP2 and criterion measures from structural equation models. To examine whether the factor of the SOP2 has the same interpretation across versions, factor congruence was estimated using Tucker’s congruence coefficient (Tucker, 1951) and evaluated according to Lorenzo-Seva and ten Berge (2006). We used the congruence coefficient instead of multigroup confirmatory factor analysis invariance testing due to identification problems of latent variables with only two indicators. In addition to evidence on the construct validity, construct reliability for each SOP2 version was estimated using McDonald Ω_w (McDonald, 1999). We also estimated Cronbach’s α for the sake of comparison with other studies. However, the obtained coefficients have to be regarded as approximations, as calculation of Cronbach’s α entails tau-equivalence testing which is not possible with the 2-item SOP2 due to identification problems of the measurement model.

Results

To estimate disattenuated correlation coefficients, structural equation models with robust maximum likelihood

Table 2. Reliability coefficients (Ω_w /Cronbach α ’s in diagonal) and congruence coefficients (Tucker, 1951) for the SOP2 score

| | Sample 1 | Sample 2 | Sample 3 |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|
| SOP2 version | German | Spanish | Italian |
| German | .82/.81 | | |
| Spanish | .99 | .78/.86 | |
| Italian | .99 | .99 | .88/.87 |

estimation containing the SOP2 and criterion measures were fitted to the data for each sample separately. All models yielded a satisfactory fit to the data (German: $\chi^2(df) = 158.6$ (110), $p < .01$, RMSEA = .043, SRMR = .044, CFI = .965, TLI = .956; Spanish: $\chi^2(df) = 89.6$ (50), $p < .05$, RMSEA = .062, SRMR = .049, CFI = .957, TLI = .943; Italian: $\chi^2(df) = 91.9$ (50), $p < .05$, RMSEA = .056, SRMR = .044, CFI = .956; TLI = .942). However, in the Spanish and Italian models, correlated residuals were specified due to content overlap of three pairs of GSE items (4/5, 2/8, 9/10).

For the German SOP2, medium correlations were observed with risk taking $r = .41$ (disattenuated $r = .48$), internal locus of control $r = .40$ (.56), external locus of control $r = -.33$ (–.44), and self-efficacy $r = .51$ (.61). In the Spanish and Italian samples, the correlation between SOP2 and self-efficacy was lower. For the adaptations, a correlation of $r = .42$ (.49) for the Spanish and $r = .42$ (.48) for the Italian sample was observed. Results on factor congruence and reliability (Ω_w/α) of the SOP2 score are depicted in Table 2. Congruence coefficients well exceed the cut-off of .95 proposed by Lorenzo-Seva and ten Berge (2006). Thus, the SOP2 factor of the German, Spanish, and Italian versions is identical. Estimates of reliability for the SOP2 score are good, considering the low number of items.

Discussion

The SOP2 is an ultra-short measure developed for research settings where time and/or money are sparse and an efficient assessment of the optimism construct is necessary, for example, survey research. As optimism is associated with a broad range of favorable outcomes in life (e.g., Carver et al., 2010), the SOP2 is suitable to pursue research questions addressed in socioeconomic, educational, or epidemiological surveys. Based on the well-established definition of the construct and an impressive body of empirical research, Kemper et al. (2013) developed the SOP2 in German samples. Results on the reliability and construct validity clearly support the psychometric quality of the measure.

To allow for the cross-cultural application of the SOP2, Spanish, Italian, and English adaptations were developed. In the research presented here, further evidence for the psychometric quality of the German version as well as first evidence for the Spanish and Italian versions is reported.

Considering the primary application of the SOP2 in research settings and its brevity, reliability estimates are good. Correlations with relevant criteria from the nomological net of the construct – self-efficacy, locus of control, and risk taking – were observed in the medium range, as expected due to previous research (e.g., Felton et al., 2003; Scheier & Carver, 1985; Schwarzer et al., 1997). Finally, coefficients of factor congruence indicate a high congruence of factors across German, Spanish, and Italian versions suggesting equality of factor interpretations (cf. Lorenzo-Seva & ten Berge, 2006). Thus, evidence on the psychometric quality is accumulating, corroborating that the SOP2 is a highly efficient, yet accurate and valid measure of the optimism construct sensu Scheier and Carver (1985). Due to its brevity, the SOP2 is particularly suited for research settings which do not allow for a more comprehensive assessment of the construct such as surveys. Due to the factor equivalence observed, the SOP2 is also a valuable measure of optimism in cross-cultural studies.

A limitation of the present research is the use of migrant samples for the Spanish and Italian adaptations of the SOP2. An extension of the presented evidence on psychometric quality with samples of Spanish and Italian respondents living in their home countries is highly appreciated. Similarly, psychometric quality of the English version should be obtained as soon as possible.

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Appendix

Different Language Versions of the Scale Optimism-Pessimism-2 (SOP2)

(1) English version (currently not validated)

Optimists are people who look to the future with confidence and who mostly expect good things to happen. How would you describe yourself?

How optimistic are you in general?

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Not at all optimistic | | | | | | Very optimistic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 |

Pessimists are people who are full of doubt when they look to the future and who mostly expect bad things to happen. How would you describe yourself?

How pessimistic are you in general?

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Not at all pessimistic | | | | | | Very pessimistic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 |

(2) German version

Optimisten sind Menschen, die mit Zuversicht in die Zukunft blicken und meistens Gutes erwarten. Bitte schätzen Sie sich selbst ein:

Wie optimistisch sind Sie im Allgemeinen?

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Gar nicht optimistisch | | | | | | Sehr optimistisch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 |

Pessimisten sind Menschen, die voller Zweifel in die Zukunft blicken und meistens Schlechtes erwarten. Bitte schätzen Sie sich selbst ein:

Wie pessimistisch sind Sie im Allgemeinen?

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Gar nicht pessimistisch | | | | | | Sehr pessimistisch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 |

(3) Spanish (castellano) version

Los optimistas son personas que ven al futuro con confianza y que esperan, mayormente, que pasen cosas buenas. ¿Cómo te describirías a ti mismo?

¿Qué tan optimista eres en general?

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| No del todo optimista | | | | | | Muy optimista |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 |

Los pesimistas son personas que están llenos de dudas cuando ven al futuro y que esperan, mayormente, que pasen cosas malas. ¿Cómo te describirías a ti mismo?

¿Qué tan pesimista eres en general?

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| No del todo pesimista | | | | | | Muy pesimista |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 |

(4) Italian version

Gli ottimisti sono persone che guardano al futuro con fiducia e che si aspettano quasi sempre che accadano cose buone.
Come descriveresti te stesso?

Quanto sei ottimista in generale?

| Per niente ottimista | | | | | | Molto ottimista |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 |

I pessimisti sono persone piene di dubbi quando guardano al futuro e che si aspettano quasi sempre che accadano cose brutte.
Come descriveresti te stesso?

Quanto sei pessimista in generale?

| Per niente pessimista | | | | | | Molto pessimista |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 |

(5) Greek version (currently not validated)

Αισιόδοξοι είναι οι άνθρωποι που κοιτάζουν το μέλλον με αυτοπεποίθηση και οι οποίοι περιμένουν ως επί το πλείστον να συμβούν καλά πράγματα. Πώς θα περιγράφατε τον εαυτό σας;

Πόσο αισιόδοξος η είστε γενικά;

| Καθόλου αισιόδοξος-η | | | | | | Πολύ αισιόδοξος-η |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 |

Απαισιόδοξοι είναι οι άνθρωποι που είναι γεμάτοι αμφιβολίες όταν κοιτούν το μέλλον και οι οποίοι, ως επί το πλείστον, περιμένουν να συμβούν άσχημα πράγματα. Πώς θα περιγράφατε τον εαυτό σας;

Πόσο απαισιόδοξος-η είστε γενικά;

| Καθόλου απαισιόδοξος-η | | | | | | Πολύ απαισιόδοξος-η |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 |